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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0480
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: PRISONER ABUSE ALLEGATIONS REPORTEDLY ON THE RISE
IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

REF: A. BANGKOK 502 (ACTIVISTS FRET)

[1](#)B. 07 BANGKOK 4201 (PRISONER ABUSE ALLEGATIONS)

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) NGO and civil society groups allege military units in the South abused detained suspected militants on dozens of occasions since 2007, including the widely-reported alleged abuse of nine student activists in Yala. While we have yet to see hard evidence of these abuses, some NGOs claim to have gathered information and evidence which may prove to be credible. These NGOs plan to submit this data to the U.N. Human Rights Council next week. We have encouraged human rights groups to fairly and thoroughly document any alleged abuses, and will continue to urge RTG officials to ensure that their counter-insurgency efforts comply with international standards. End Summary.

REPORTS OF TORTURE

[1](#)2. (C) Human rights NGOs have increasingly alleged lately that Royal Thai Army units in southern Thailand are abusing suspects detained on suspicion of involvement in the insurgency in the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Songkhla. While the military has been accused of abusing and possibly torturing southern detainees in the past (ref A), in recent weeks, NGOs and civil rights activists have alleged that military units now abuse detainees with greater frequency. NGOs have not yet provided hard evidence documenting an increase in abuses, but there is clearly a much increased level of concern among normally responsible NGOs.

[1](#)3. (C) On February 16, a representative of the Muslim Lawyers Centre, a group representing Thai Muslim attorneys, told a seminar that since July 2007 his organization has documented 59 cases in which the security forces had allegedly tortured

suspected insurgents who had been detained under provisions of the emergency decree or martial law; two of these incidents reportedly resulted in deaths. The Centre alleged that in most incidents, security officials abused or tortured suspected insurgents within three days of their arrest. Detainees alleged they had been forced to sleep in a cold room, forced to eat rotten food, and were been beaten, brutalized, or otherwise assaulted while in detention. According to media reports, the Centre alleged that the Yala 11th Taskforce of the 41st Paramilitary Regiment, Yala's Wang Phaya Camp, and Pattani Province's Ingkayut Borihan Camp were the sources of most of the allegations. (Note: There have been previous allegations of similar abuse at Ingkayut Borihan in particular
-- see ref B. End note.)

14. (C) On February 29, a representative of the Muslim Lawyers Centre told us that the group had documented in a report these and other abuses by security forces in the South. According to the Centre, the allegations of abuse have come directly from the detainees, their lawyers, or their relatives. (Note: The Centre has agreed to provide us this report within the next several days. End note.) The Centre contact told us the organization had received 102 allegations of abuse in the first two months of 2008 compared with 119 abuse allegations in all of 2007. The Centre plans to join with other human rights NGOs to present their findings to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva during the week of March 10-14. On March 3, Human Rights Watch's Sunai Phasuk told us he would travel to the South in March to also document government abuses in the region. According to Sunai, the present human rights situation in the South was "worse than under the Thaksin government."

STUDENTS ARRESTED, ALLEGEDLY TORTURED

15. (SBU) In February, the media widely reported allegations that the Thai military had abused nine students attending the Yala Commercial School and Yala Rajabhat University. According to media and NGO reports, on January 27 and 28 plain-clothed army officers raided dormitories and arrested students who had reportedly provided legal and human rights education to local villagers. On January 31, relatives who were permitted to visit some of the arrested students at Ingkayut Borihan alleged that interrogators "beat the students with heavy objects and kicked in their faces." Bruises from their wounds were reportedly clearly visible. Military officials alleged in a February 4 Bangkok Post report that four of the students were members of a militant organization. The students were subsequently released due to a reported lack of evidence to prosecute them. A Yala student group and some human rights NGOs allege the students were, in fact, arrested for their activism in the community.

16. (SBU) In a separate incident, a human rights NGO alleged that a religious teacher was abused following his detention on a February 5 raid at the Rungrot Witthaya School in Songkhla Province. The NGO alleged that members of the Thai Army's 43rd Special Forces Unit kicked and punched the teacher with a plastic bag over his head to induce a confession of involvement with the insurgency. His eardrums were allegedly punctured as a result of the abuse. The teacher was reportedly later transported to Ingkayut Borihan, where interrogators allegedly beat him again before releasing him on February 7. In all of these cases, there have been no reports of the military investigating units or soldiers involved in the alleged abuse.

HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS MOBILIZE

17. (U) In response to these reports, a National Human Rights Commissioner issued a statement on February 11 indicating that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) had received approximately 40 reports of abuse and disappearances since 2007, including reports of four deaths (three of them in the

South) as a result of abuse. The NHRC revealed that most abuse allegedly takes place within three days of arrest, when military regulations prevent detainees from meeting with lawyers or relatives. The NHRC urged the government to publicly identify arresting units and stressed that the army should cooperate with relatives and the NHRC to facilitate visits to arrested individuals. The NHRC urged the government to promptly investigate allegations of abuse.

COMMENT

18. (C) Reports of detainee abuse in southern Thailand are not new; we still have yet to see hard evidence indicating a measurable increase in the abuse of suspected insurgents detained in the South. Nevertheless, the perception by usually reliable NGOs is that the abuse of southern detainees, if not increasing, is at least undiminished and taking place with impunity. We have encouraged our contacts in the human rights community to document alleged abuse fairly and thoroughly so the veracity of these allegations can be independently verified to the maximum extent possible.

We will continue to work closely with human rights organizations to monitor the situation and we will continue to encourage government officials to ensure their counterinsurgency efforts meet internationally-accepted human rights standards.

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